

Town of Eagle
Northern Commercial Company Store
Eagle, ~~Yukon-Koyukuk Division~~
Alaska SOUTHEAST FAIRBANKS

HABS No. AK-7 B

HABS
AK,
19-EGL,
1-B-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

ADDITIONAL
PHOTOS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HABS
AK,
19-EGL,
1-B-1

ARCHITECTURAL DATA FORM

STATE ALASKA	COUNTY YUKON-COCHING DIVISION	TOWN OR VICINITY EAGLE
HISTORIC NAME OF STRUCTURE (INCLUDE SOURCE FOR NAME) TOWN OF EAGLE (NHL)		HABS NO. AK-7 B
SECONDARY OR COMMON NAMES OF STRUCTURE Northern Commercial Company Store		
COMPLETE ADDRESS (DESCRIBE LOCATION FOR RURAL SITES) 220 Front Street, Eagle, Alaska		
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE SOURCE) 1898-99 (Grauman, <u>Eagle</u>)		ARCHITECT(S) (INCLUDE SOURCE)
SIGNIFICANCE (ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL, INCLUDE ORIGINAL USE OF STRUCTURE) Located on the bank of the Yukon River which permitted stern wheelers to dock immediately alongside building. See HABS No. AK-7.		
STYLE (IF APPROPRIATE)		
MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS) wood		
SHAPE AND DIMENSIONS OF STRUCTURE (SKETCHED FLOOR PLANS ON SEPARATE PAGES ARE ACCEPTABLE)		
EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE		
INTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (DESCRIBE FLOOR PLANS, IF NOT SKETCHED)		
MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS WITH DATES		
PRESENT CONDITION AND USE Front, vacant; portion of rear occupied in the summer by owner; poor to fair condition.		
OTHER INFORMATION AS APPROPRIATE Within Eagle Historic District		
SOURCES OF INFORMATION (INCLUDING LISTING ON NATIONAL REGISTER, STATE REGISTERS, ETC.) NHL; AHRs: SEE BIBLIOGRAPHY HABS No. AK-7.		
COMPILER, AFFILIATION Sandra M. Faulkner, Historian, National Park Service		DATE July 15, 1986

NORTHERN COMMERCIAL COMPANY STORE
220 Front Street
Eagle
Southeast Fairbanks County
Alaska

HABS No. AK-7-B

HABS
AK.
19-EGE,
1-B-

ADDENDUM TO
NORTHERN COMMERCIAL COMPANY STORE
220 Front Street
Eagle
Yukon-Koyukuk
Alaska

XEROGRAPHIC COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013

NORTHERN COMMERCIAL COMPANY STORE

220 Front Street

Eagle

Southeast Fairbanks County (changed from Yukon-Koyukuk)
Alaska

HABS No. AK-7-B

ADDENDUM TO

NORTHERN COMMERCIAL COMPANY STORE

220 Front Street

Eagle

Yukon-Koyukuk

Alaska

HABS

AK

19-EGL,

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REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Alaska Regional Office
National Park Service
2525 Gambell Street
Anchorage, Alaska 99503

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

NORTHERN COMMERCIAL COMPANY
STORE AND WAREHOUSE

HABS
AK
19-EG1,
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AK-7-A,
AK-7-B

Location: On Front Street, Block 2, Lots 13 and 14 in the town of Eagle, the northern terminus of the Taylor Highway, on the left bank of the Yukon River where it meets Mission Creek, approximately 11 miles west from the Canadian border of the Yukon Territory, central eastern Alaska.

Present Owner: Jess Knight, Kansas City, Missouri

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: Eagle, Alaska, established in 1898, survived the end of the Klondike Gold Rush because of its importance as a military post, as a center for government in the Forty Mile region, and as a busy trading port on the Yukon River. The Northern Commercial Company's warehouse and store were built along the banks of the Yukon by the Alaska Exploration Company in 1898-99 and, for over fifty years, served the backcountry community as a general store, a gold exchange, and a mail and telegram station. These buildings symbolize the historic importance of Eagle's river commerce and trade to the lives of the miners, trappers, and settlers in the major community of the Forty Mile River Drainage.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: c. 1898-99.
2. Builders: Alaska Exploration Company
3. Original and subsequent owners: Alaska Exploration Company built and owned the buildings. In 1901, the Alaska Commercial Company effected a merger with the Empire Transportation Company that resulted in one corporation regulating two companies: the Northern Navigation Company, involved exclusively in transportation and shipping; and the Northern Commercial Company (N.C.C.), a merchandising venture. That same year, the N.C.C. bought out the Alaska Exploration Company, including its warehouse and store in Eagle, Alaska. In 1915, Messrs. Charles Ott and Scheele bought the riverfront buildings from N.C.C. and operated them until 1927. At that time, Ott and Scheele sold the store and warehouse back to N.C.C.,

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having bought the Crooked Creek mining operation on Seventymile River. N.C.C. operated out of the riverfront store until 1950, when they bought out the Biederman General Store on B Street and moved their operations there. After 1959, the buildings were sold to George and Dorothy King, who owned them from 1960-1970. Jess and Catherine Knight, now of Kansas City, Missouri, bought the buildings from the Kings and own them at present.

4. Original plans and construction: Alaska Exploration Company originally built the two structures. Within three years, the Northern Commercial Company bought the buildings, and it is assumed that the N.C.C. acquired the building plans with its purchase.

Warehouse: a stud structure, 28'-0" x 60'-0", one story plus loft space; with a corrugated galvanized metal roof and siding, the roof medium pitched; sliding, barn-style front door; hinged side door; three over three double-hung, sash windows, one on each gable; plank-decked flooring; 2'-0" by 6'-0" rough-sewn lumber, stud walls.

Store: log structure, multi-leveled, rectangular plan 30'-0" x 48'-0"; gable roof constructed of 2'-0" x 6'-0" joist, sheathed with corrugated, galvanized metal; false front, simple, stepped cornices with dentils; hinged, single, door centered on store front flanked by two units consisting of three over three windows stacked vertically; transom of three sashes of three over three windows aligned horizontally; tongue-and-groove floors; white canvas-covered log walls; built-in shelves, counters, and display cases; single door in center of rear wall leads to storage area; living quarters above storage area; attic storage above front room of store.

5. Alterations and additions: The false front on the store is the only addition to the building that can be detected from present observation. The exact date that the false front was added to the store is not known. According to local records, however, when Messrs. Ott and Scheele bought the buildings from the N.C.C. in 1915, they wrote that they were building on the river front. Since local photographs prove the buildings were there at that time, it can be assumed Ott and Scheele added the store's false front then. Before that time, records suggest that the N.C.C. used both of the river front buildings only as warehouses and sold

merchandise out of their store on B Street. If this is the case, the N.C.C. would have had no reason to put a false front on the Front Street store and to sell out of the river front buildings, as Messrs. Ott and Scheele had.

6. Outbuildings: Two abandoned structures besides the store and warehouse survive on the property: a dilapidated trailer and another structure that needs to be identified by further research and verified as belonging to the property site.

B. Historical Content:

The Northern Commercial Company store and warehouse, traditionally known by those names, were built by the Alaska Exploration Company between 1898-1899. At that time, gold miners trying to escape heavy Canadian taxes were settling the town of Eagle. They chose a location on the Yukon River ten or so miles west of the Canadian border to incorporate their village, and Eagle soon became a gold rush boom town like many other settlements in the Forty Mile region.

Years before the gold rush reached this part of the Yukon, several companies had already been through the area with fur trading operations. Hutchinson, Kohl, & Company, an early Alaskan trading company which would one day be known as the Northern Commercial Company, came into the area as early as 1868. Few companies stayed in the region until the gold rush of the late 1890s. With the settling of Eagle in 1898 and its population explosion from an original twenty-eight settlers to over 700 in one year, three stores opened in town: the Alaskan Commercial Company, the North American Transportation and Trade Company, and the Alaskan Exploration Company. This last trader, the Alaskan Exploration Company, was backed by the Rothschilds of England and built the buildings on Front Street, a prime location for a warehouse and store because it permitted stern wheelers to dock immediately alongside the buildings.

In 1901, because of increased competition in Alaskan trade, the Alaska Commercial Company merged with the International Mercantile Marine Company and Alaska Goldfields, Ltd. to form two new companies, the Northern Navigation Company and the Northern Commercial Company. Northern Commercial, the merchandising division of this new business, bought the Alaskan Exploration Company buildings on Front Street and continued to trade in Eagle for many years after the end of the gold rush.

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Northern Commercial used the river-front buildings strictly as warehousing facilities until 1915. At that time, the Company left Eagle. Business had slowed greatly with the closing of nearby Fort Egbert in 1911 and the diminishing commercial traffic on the Yukon River. Messrs. Ott and Scheele bought the river-front buildings and began to operate a merchandising business from the store building, using the warehouse for storing supplies.

Out of these buildings, the local gentlemen sold the same merchandise that other businesses in Eagle had been selling, from staple foods and mining equipment to sleighs and fancy chocolates. Miners from all around the Forty-Mile region traded gold from their claims and furs from trapping for better mining equipment, as well as fuel and food for the year. The Eagle townspeople wanted as many consumer comforts as they could buy, and Ott and Scheele did a good business while operating from the river-front buildings. The merchants sent telegrams and mailed letters through the store. Ott and Scheele frequently extended credit to their customers and sent innumerable pokes of gold to their banks in California when the payments arrived.

By 1922, however, Ott and Scheele decided to close their store in Eagle and start a mining business on Seventymile River. Northern Commercial Company, under new management, bought the store and warehouse back from the gentlemen in 1923. Company agent C.B. Haraden managed the store during much of the 1920s and 1930s, with occasional managerial help from Charlie Ott, the previous owner. Throughout these decades and the next twenty years, the population of Eagle grew very little, and agents from the Northern Commercial Company came and left in succession and without incident.

By the early 1950s, the Northern Commercial Company consolidated its operations by moving its mercantile business from the river front to the Biederman General Store on B Street and sold out of that building until 1959. Doing only a tenth of the business it did between 1899-1900, the Company decided in 1959 to sell its property in Eagle. The store on B Street was sold to Charlie Biederman, a long-time local villager, and the buildings on the river front were sold to George and Dorothy King. The couple may or may not have operated a merchandising business out of the buildings; there are no records that a store operated there during the 1960s. In 1970, Jess Knight, a former Northern Commercial Company store manager, and his wife, Catherine, bought the warehouse and store. Although the Knights did not open the store for business, they lived in the apartment above the store for several seasons in the 1980s.

Because the Yukon River is gradually changing its course, today the buildings lie dangerously close to the river's edge. The structures are also in disrepair. Old store merchandise and the Knights' personal belongings lie scattered about the warehouse and in the apartment above the store. In the last ten years, Mr. Knight has torn up some of the flooring in the front room of the store and has taken off pieces of canvas from the store wall, revealing the log structuring. The owner has also placed log braces against the inside of the store to keep the walls from collapsing.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

AK-7-A

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The warehouse is a simple two-story, stud structure.
2. Condition of fabric: some disrepair

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 28'-0" x 60'-0". The warehouse is a one-story, simple rectangular structure. Height to the top of the roof is 20'-0". A facade connecting the warehouse to the store is missing.
2. Foundations: Inaccessible joists
3. Walls: Sheathing is vertical, galvanized, corrugated metal.
4. Structural system, framing: Balloon frame with 2" x 6" rough-sawn studs, 24" o.c.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Entrance facing Front Street is two 3'-0" x 7'-0" sliding barn doors. Each is covered with heavy gauge, galvanized metal. The side door, facing the store to the north, is a 3'-9" x 6'-8" wood plank door.
 - b. Windows and shutters: A double glazed, milled sash with six lights, three over three, double-hung window is located at each gable end.
6. Roof: The roof is gabled, with corrugated, galvanized

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metal. A flagpole rises from the gable facing Front Street.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Flooring: 1-1/4" x 8-1/2" rough sawn wood planks cover joists which are inaccessible.
2. Decorative features and trim: There is a loft against the west wall and overhead storage built against the north wall.

AK-7-B

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The store is a simple, two-story structure with a false front
2. Condition of fabric: some disrepair

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 30'-6" x 48'-0". The store is a two-story, simple rectangular structure. A facade connecting the store with the warehouse is missing.
2. Foundations: 2" x 6" joists, 24" o.c.
3. Walls: Exterior walls are 10" average-diameter spruce logs hewn flat on the interior and hewn square on the ends. The corners are square notches. The east wall, facing Front Street, is a false storefront style. The north cornice on this false storefront is slightly displaced. On the south side, a portion of the original log course is missing; the area has been covered with plywood. Stacked shipping pallets create stairs and an entry platform to a second-story door on the west wall of the building. An outdoor shower and a hot-water heater also lie on the west side.
4. Structural system, framing: 10" average-diameter spruce logs.
5. Chimneys: A chimney stands in the center of the roof.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The east door, facing Front Street, is a 3'-0" x 6'-6" milled wood door with

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two over two panels. The first-story, west door is a 3'-0" x 6'-8" wood plank door. The second-story, west door is a 2'-2" x 4'-8" milled wood door with glass pane over three wood panels.

- b. Windows and shutters: Glazed sash are milled with six lights, three over three. An awning attached to the storefront above the windows is missing.
- 7. Roof: The gabled roof is made of corrugated, galvanized metal. The east gable meets the false storefront. A flagpole rises from this front gable.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: The first floor consists of a store in the front, 30'-6" x 33'-0", with a storage room behind it. A smaller, walled-in area sits in the northwest corner of the storage room. The second floor consists of an attic/storage over the store and an apartment over the first-story storage room.
- 2. Stairways: Stairway from the first-floor storage room to the apartment above, along the south wall.
- 3. Flooring: In both the store and storage room, 3-1/4" and 5-1/4" tongue and groove planking covers the joists. The floor buckles a bit in the storage room. Plywood covers the joists in the apartment, and 1" x variable width rough-sawn planking covers the joists in the attic.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: In the store, the walls and ceiling are covered with canvas painted white. The partition walls between the store and storage room are 3-1/4", vertical tongue and groove beadboard painted green. The walls and ceiling of the apartment are covered with 1/16" thick cardboard paper, 36" wide.
- 5. Doorways and doors: Doorway between store and storage room; door to small, walled-in area within the storage room; door from the apartment to the attic/storage.
- 6. Decorative features and trim: Cabinets and shelves along the north, west, and south walls of the store are missing. There are shelves along the north and east walls of the attic/storage.
- 7. Mechanical equipment: An iron stove sits in the middle of the store. A sheet steel wood stove sits in the middle of the apartment.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views:

Note: copies of photographs in collection of National Park Service, Alaska Regional Office, Office of Cultural Resources.

"Former officers quarters at Fort Egbert; Northern Commercial Company General Store; Warehouse." Jess and Cathryn Knight, photographers, ca. Winter, 1940-1941.

"Northern Commercial Company General Store and nearby buildings." ca. before 1915. In Erskine Collection, Box 1, folder 36, Eagle of Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

"Northern Commercial Company General Store and Warehouse on river front." ca. after 1923. In Erskine Collection, Box 1, folder 36, Eagle of Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

"Northern Commercial Company Front Street buildings with men and shipped supplies in foreground." ca. before 1915. In Erskine Collection, Box 1, folder 36, Eagle, of Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

"Northern Commercial Company Front Street buildings with supplies stacked in front." ca before 1915. in Erskine Collection, Box 1, folder 36, Eagle, of Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

B. Bibliography

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Ott and Scheele Correspondence and Invoices and Northern Commercial Company Correspondence and Invoices, Archives, Eagle Historical Society.

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2. Secondary and published sources:

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JOURNALS:

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Dawson Weekly News

Klondike Miner and Yukon Advertiser

Klondike Nugget (Semi-Weekly) 1898-1903.

Yukon Sun. 1899-1903.

Yukon World. 1904-1907

C. For Further Research

DUDLEY BECK

560 Wood Avenue
Winslow, WA 98110
(206) 842-6310

Mr. Beck is a retired executive for Northern Commercial Company (N.C.C.) and worked there from 1950 until the Company was liquidated in 1976. He was General Manager in charge of all N.C.C. retail stores, theaters, commercial fishing businesses, power plants, and airplane services. When the company was liquidated, he sold most of the retail stores, including the business in Eagle, to local merchants

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or enterprises. One of his responsibilities was to redesign the N.C.Co. retail building in Anchorage, what is now the Nordstroms building, after the earthquake of 1964. His experience in Alaskan commerce and trade is extensive and his knowledge valuable.

Referred to by Barri Morris, Alaska Commercial Company,
General Store Manager in Barrow: (907) 852-6188.

CAROL KNIGHT COPLAND

5107 #11 Stonehedge Blvd.
Fort Wayne, IN 46835
(219) 486-5607

Carol Knight Copland is the daughter of the present owners, Jess and Cathryn Knight. Mr. and Mrs. Knight are currently living with their son Billy Knight in Kansas City, MO, and are reported to be in poor physical and mental condition. Carol is writing a biography of their lives in Alaska through their papers and conversation and has been in regular contact with the Eagle Historical Society. She hopes to finish the biographical sketch by December 1990.

ELVA SCOTT
Home: (907) 547-2230

EAGLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 23
Eagle, Alaska 99738

Elva Scott is archivist for the Eagle Historical Society and spearheads most of its activities, archival and otherwise. She is an excellent source of information on historic Eagle, its buildings, and its early residents and their activities.

PARKS CANADA: YUKON TERRITORY DISTRICT
KLONDIKE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE, Whitehorse
Al Fisk, Superintendent

(403) 993-5462

Several years ago, Parks Canada stabilized an N.C.C. building in Dawson. During the stabilization procedure, Parks Canada worked with the building's existing material, squaring and reroofing the building and sealing its exterior. Nothing was restored, and only enough research

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was conducted to proceed with the stabilization. The Klondike National Historic Site in Whitehorse has the file of research and plans for the stabilization and are very willing to share their information of N.C.C. construction with inquirers. Contact Al Fisk, Superintendent, for further information.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
BANCROFT LIBRARY,
Annegret Ogden, Archivist

Berkeley, CA 99720
(415) 642-6481

ALASKA HISTORY LIBRARY

P.O. Box G
Juneau, AK 99811

India Spartz of the library staff found that the N.C.C. records there consisted of letter-press books that contained receipts and described retail transactions. The file is listed under the heading "Northern Commercial Company - Eagle; Subject MS-26" and it covers the dates 1903-1904. At that time, the Front Street buildings (plat 2, lots 12-14) were being used as warehouses for N.C.C., and the store from which they operated was located on another street.

Ms. Spartz also mentioned that the Wickersham Photograph Collection, held at the Alaska History Library, was also on microfiche in the Alaska Collection, Anchorage Municipal Library. These photos, from Judge Wickersham's collection, the first judge in Eagle, may contain early photographs of the town of Eagle and the commercial businesses there.

STANFORD UNIVERSITY
DEPT OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
Linda Long

Stanford University Libraries
Stanford, CA 94305-6004
(415) 723-1022

UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA-FAIRBANKS
Marge Nailor, Archivist

(907) 474-6773

The University of Alaska, Fairbanks holds in its archives a collection of N.C.C. records entitled "Correspondence of Kodiak Post, 1868-1898." This collection is 70 feet long, and the record description statement explains the evolution

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of the N.C.C. from the Russian-American Company during the Russian period of Alaskan history.

UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA-SOUTHEAST

11120 Glacier Highway
Juneau, AK 99801
(907) 789-4466

ALASKA COMMERCIAL COMPANY
Sam Salkin, President

624 W. Potter Drive
Anchorage, AK 99503
(907) 276-2226

Barri Morris, General Store Manager
and "Corporate Historian"

P.O. Box 9
Barrow, AK 99723
(907) 852-6188

Although Mr. Morris is only an amateur historian for the company, he has the names and addresses of several N.C.C. retirees who have had extensive experience in Alaska and at its retail outposts. He has a small file of historical information pertaining to N.C.C. and the Alaska Commercial Company.